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Spies and Counter-Spies Unglorified

BURN AFTER READING: The Espionage History of World War II. By Ladislav Farago. 319 pp. New York: Walker and Company. \$4.95.

By Gordon A. Craig

IN NO war in Western history were espionage, counter-espionage, sabotage and subversion conducted on so vast a scale as in the second World War. This was almost necessarily so in view of the fact that the greater part of continental Europe was under Axis occupation for five years and that, in the conquered areas, espionage in its various forms was the only means that defiant patriots had of resisting their enemies effectively. Thousands of men and women from every walk of life participated in clandestine operations, sometimes independently, sometimes under the direction of the intelligence services of the belligerent powers. Their tasks were at times quite as exciting and glamorous as those of the agents in the novels of E. Phillips Oppenheim and Ian Fleming; more frequently they were mere matters of routine. But glamorous or dull, they were almost invariably dangerous, and a very high percentage of those who carried them out died violent deaths at the hands of the enemy.

There are already a great many books in print about espionage in World War II, but there is none that is as comprehensive in its coverage or as free from exaggeration in its approach as Ladislav Farago's "Burn After Reading." It is refreshing to find a writer on this subject who admits at the outset that he neither approves of espionage nor has much admiration for its practitioners. Formerly Chief of Research and Planning in the U. S. Navy's Special Warfare Branch, Mr. Farago knows his subject; but, his long experience with it led him, he tells us, "to look to regard some of the legends with a mild contempt, in the light of Virgil, who warned that vice is nourished by secrecy. Much of the business is rather sordid, a scrape of grown men

into boggy trannies, a nebulous pastime to which no adult who cherishes his full dignity and integrity should devote unwarranted attention. For another thing, I could not wholly sanction the inherent deceit of the game. What usually began as temporary skulduggery frequently led to corruption that the *ad hoc* practitioners of the game carried like an ugly scar for the rest of their lives." It is melancholy, he adds, to observe the results of this in "the dismal way" in which espionage has today been turned into an enduring instrument of national power, "even by great nations of traditional decency."

Thanks to his bias, Mr. Farago refrains from glorifying the spies who parade through his pages, recording their activities with an admirable detachment. Moreover, although there are occasions when he seems to think too highly of the potential effectiveness of intelligence—when he says, for example, that the Sorge spy ring's reports from Tokyo to the Soviet government, informing it that Japan had decided against attacking the Soviet Union, "certainly saved Moscow" in 1941, and when he suggests that more intimate Allied contact with the German resistance in 1944 would have "contribute[d] decisively to the early termination of the war, making the invasion superfluous"—these overstatements are rare.

Instead, the reader finds here balanced accounts of the work of Admiral Canaris' *Abwehr*, M. I. 6, the *Deuxième Bureau* and other national intelligence agencies and the networks of agents they employed, as well as descriptions of the activities of the various resistance movements, like the anti-Hitler *Rote Kapelle*, which infiltrated the *Lebensraum* and other

ministries and sent invaluable information about Germany's operational plans and troop movements to the Soviet Union. There are excellent chapters on the methods used by British counter-intelligence to combat the enemy in the days when a German invasion of Great Britain was still a distinct possibility, on the Soviet espionage ring in Switzerland, on the inadequacy of American intelligence services on the eve of Pearl Harbor, and on the later work of the Office of Strategic Services and the Office of Naval Intelligence in this country. Mr. Farago has a high regard for the men who directed the British intelligence services during the war, as well as for three outstanding American administrators, William J. Donovan, who founded the O. S. S., Allen Welsh Dulles, who directed the listening post at Berne, and Mr. Farago's own superior in O. N. I., Admiral Ellis M. Zacharias.

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